

New-Orleans May 6<sup>th</sup> 1873.

Sir,

I have the honor of acknowledging the receipt of your communication of the 29<sup>th</sup> ult<sup>o</sup>, asking an expression of my views as to the probable expense of putting the Branch Mint here in working order, first as an Assay Office, and, secondly, for all practical operations of a mint including gold and silver coinage, also as to its capacity.

In reply I beg leave to make the following statement. In the early summer of 1867, the then Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. McCulloch, had the intention of starting this mint on nickels; I then made several reports on the subject to the Director, Dr. Linderman, both by letter and in person. My reports and statements as to the condition of the coining machinery were much more favorable than was expected, and it was determined by the department to start it at once. The reference of the question to the Attorney General resulted in an adverse opinion; he decided that, as this branch was established for the coinage of gold and silver only, the Department could not authorize the manufacture of nickels. In consequence of



this decision the project was abandoned and I was sent home to resume my duties as the Custodian of the establishment. — Everything remained in the same condition until about 4 years ago, when the workmen, four in number, allowed me for keeping the buildings and works in good condition, were discharged, whatever <sup>has</sup> been done since, towards the preservation of the machinery, amounts to almost nothing. In consequence of this the machinery has become somewhat rusty, but is not permanently injured as yet. I am of opinion that six or seven workmen would be required for about 3 months to put everything in its former condition. With the exception of two roll-benches, worth about \$800 each, and the assay apparatus, (the former were removed by the Confederates the latter was scattered and destroyed by the troops quartered in the mint), the establishment is complete, and could turn out an annual coinage of from three to six millions in gold and silver. The building is well arranged for the purposes of a mint, spacious, and admits readily of an increase of its capacity to that of any other mint in the country. The establishment of an assay office, only, would cost but little less than that of a mint, as everything belonging to the coining department is here, with the exception of the above mentioned



roll-benches. As soon as the assay apparatus, for which I filed estimates with the Director in 1867, is supplied, the mint might go into active operation in three months, - assays of bullion can be made, without danger of further interruption, in one month.

I beg leave to suggest that it would be advantageous to make some repairs to the building at the same time the machinery and apparatus are being put in order, to avoid delay when coinage shall have been resumed. - While employed as Supt. of Repairs under Mr. Mullet, to fix up the offices of the Assistant Treasurer, I submitted several estimates of the cost of repairs to the building, the least of which was \$5000. This sum was deemed but barely sufficient to keep the building in a state of preservation. Complete repairs cannot well be estimated now at less than \$25,000 to \$30,000. - I am of opinion that no time should be lost to paint the iron and wood work which is now fast going to destruction. \$5000 will do this, but it would be more economical to spend double this sum. More thorough repairs can be made, from year to year, without materially interrupting coinage operations.



The Branch skirt was thoroughly repaired and made fire-proof in 1856, at a cost of about \$250.000. It is now as good as on the breaking out of the war, except the deterioration consequent on leaving it to itself during so long a period.

I beg leave to enclose a photograph of the rear of the building, on Barracks street, and to remark that complete plans of the building were made in 1867 and forwarded to the Supervising Architect,

Very Respectfully

Yours Obedt. Servt.

A. F. Bongano.

Hon. Wm. A. Richardson,

Secretary of the Treasury

Washington,

D.C.